

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 17, 2006

For More Information:  
Lucy Caldwell, Public  
Information Officer  
703/934-0623

**APPROACHING HEAT WAVE PROMPTS HEALTH MESSAGE**  
***“STAY COOL”***

(Culpeper) – The Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District wants residents to protect themselves and their community from heat-related illnesses throughout the heatwave approaching the region this week.

“Summer is a spectacular time to enjoy the outdoors and to participate in the many recreational and sporting activities, cultural festivals, and county fairs here in our region,” said Lilian Peake, M.D., M.P.H., Health Director for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District. “However, residents need to pay particularly close attention to the extreme heat we are experiencing, and that is expected to continue through the week. Heat stroke can target the elderly, but anyone who spends time outside, or in non-air conditioned locations is at risk for heat related illnesses,” she said.

Heat stroke is the most serious heat related illness. It occurs when the body is unable to control its temperature: the body’s temperature rises rapidly, loses its ability to sweat, and is unable to cool down. Elderly people do not adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature. Also, people who take prescription medications could be impaired in their body’s ability to regulate its temperature or ability to perspire. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided quickly. There are several warning signs people should look for during prolonged, extreme heat exposure:

- Extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees)
- Red, hot, dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Dizziness, nausea, paleness
- Throbbing headache
- Shallow, fast breathing

If these symptoms are present, call for immediate medical assistance. While medics are en route, caretakers should get the symptomatic person to a cool, shady area. Cooling the person, with a hose, cool shower, or tub bath is important. Monitoring the person’s temperature and continuing cooling efforts is critical.

Dr. Peake reminds residents that while children, the elderly, and people with certain medical conditions are at greater risk for heat illnesses, people who participate in physical outdoor activities or drink alcohol are also at increased risk. She advises “air conditioning is the best way to protect people from heat related illness. Fans may be helpful, at certain temperatures, but research and history shows us that fan usage does not reduce mortality risk during heat-waves and can actually increase heat stress if used improperly.”

The Rappahannock Health District and Virginia Department of Health recommend residents take the following actions to help stay cool and avoid heat related illness this summer:

Drink plenty of fluids- 2-4 glasses each hour. To replace salt and minerals lost from sweating, drink fruit juice or sports beverage during exercise or when working outside. (If you’re on a fluid-restricted diet, diuretics, or low-salt diet, ask your doctor)

Keep cool indoors. Stay in air-conditioning. Shower or take cool baths.

Plan outdoor activities around the heat. If you must go outside, go in the morning or at night when it’s cooler. Resting frequently when you are outside will give your body a chance to recover from the heat.

Avoid sunburn and wear light clothing. Sunburn limits your body’s ability to keep cool and causes loss of body fluids. Use sunscreen and wear a hat.

Limit physical activity until your body adjusts to the heat.

Do not keep children or pets in cars with windows rolled up. Temperatures inside a car with closed (or partially opened) windows can reach up to 150 degrees quickly, resulting in heat stroke and death.

Use the “buddy system” if you’re working outside. Heat-related illnesses can cause confusion, therefore, make sure someone else knows of your plans. Relatives and friends should check on elderly family or neighbors throughout the day during heatwaves.

For more information on handling heat, or staying cool, log onto [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/elderlyheat.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/elderlyheat.asp), or contact health district staff at 540/829-7350.

####